

ETHNIC MINORITY EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

Welcome remarks ___ Consul General Hart

Overview ___ Phyllis Cheung, Executive Director, Unison

Panel One: Handling multiculturalism and diversity in the classroom

Moderator: Phyllis Cheung, Executive Director, Hong Kong Unison

- A Former "Designated" School Experience (Dr Chan Kui-pui, Principal of Delia Memorial School (Glee Path))
- A Mainstream School Experience (Principal Stephen Chu, CSBS Mrs Aw Boon Haw Secondary School)
- Ethnic Minority Education in Hong Kong: Lessons from Research (Dr Miron Bhowmik, Post-doctoral Fellow, Center for Governance & Citizenship, Hong Kong Institute of Education)
- Muslims and Islam in U.S. Education: A New Challenge for Multiculturalism (Dr Liz Jackson, Division of Policy, Administration and Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, HKU)

Panel Two: Exploring mainstream, integrated and inclusive education

Moderator: Dr Puja Kapai, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, HKU

- Mainstreaming for a Multicultural School Environment: Identity, Equality and Integration (Dr Puja Kapai)
- Sharing by an Ethnic Minority Student (Prativa Sapkota, HKUST student)
- Early childhood inclusion: What did research tell us? (Dr Wu-Ying Hsieh, Assistant Professor, Division of Learning, Development and Diversity, Faculty of Education, HKU)

Open sharing

Moderator: Nini Forino, Director of Public Affairs, U.S. Consulate General



Seminar on the Ethnic Minority Education in Hong Kong Hosted by the U.S. Consulate General for Hong Kong and Macau

December 10, 2014

Convening on International Human Rights Day, December 10, 2014, the U.S. Consulate General for Hong Kong and Macau hosted a seminar on ethnic minority education in Hong Kong. The seminar began with opening remarks by Mr. Clifford A. Hart Jr., the Consul General of the United States of America, who framed the discussion by focusing on collaborative learning from the United States' historical struggle for equal rights and minority inclusion in creating an equitable system of education in Hong Kong. This became an important focal point for the seminar's discussion, with speakers on both of the discussion's two panels highlighting the lessons learned from integrating minority groups into the United States' educational system.

Overview of the state of Ethnic Minority Education in Hong Kong

Phyllis Cheung, Executive Director introduced the context surrounding the seminar by painting a grim portrait of the state of Hong Kong's system of ethnic minority (EM) education:

- Ethnic minorities, which comprise 6.4% of Hong Kong's population, continue to be poorly represented within Hong Kong's population of workers with post-secondary education.
- In spite of policy efforts aimed at overhauling the city's educational system, EM students continue to face obstacles to their education in both designated and mainstream educational institutions, which range from institutionalized racism to the continued unavailability of resources needed to meet their special Chinese language learning needs.
- These barriers, coupled with the failure of public policy to create meaningful change and a dearth of funding available to schools that design their own curriculum around individualized pedagogical needs, has precluded the racial integration of ethnic minorities into Hong Kong.
- Given that from 2001 until today, Hong Kong's EM population has grown by over 1/3, to 452,000, unless these underlying issues are addressed these problems are set to compound.

Panel One: Handling Multiculturalism and Diversity in the Classroom

The first panel included the perspective of two educators, one researcher, and one author. The panel was moderated by Phyllis Cheung.

- Dr. Chan Kui-pui, Principal of the Delia Memorial School (Glee Path) provided the view of an administrator of Hong Kong's designated school system. Chan noted that improving EM education is intrinsically tied to solving several problems in public perception, including public sentiment that misidentifies a lack of engagement in school as a consequence of the value that certain cultures place on education.

Chan then provided an overview of his experience in reforming the Delia Memorial School to better meet the needs of EM students. Since 2002, when the school first began providing additional Chinese language education resources to ethnic minorities, students of the school have exhibited a dramatic improvement in their level of Chinese language proficiency: from, in the case of one student, being “unable to order even Singapore Fried Noodles” to “speaking Chinese as a second language” as certified by the GCSE. This transformation occurred through the provision of four Chinese language lessons a week, concurrent to which the school implemented stricter standards for educators through tying promotions to performance benchmarks and, for students, limiting rates of truancy and implementing minimum conduct scores. Defending his methodology, Chan provided several examples of successes from the system: EM graduates of HKUST and HKU, and interracial marriages.

These achievements of the Delia School were placed in context in the second panel when a former student of Chan’s commented that she still felt her education in Chinese had lacked practicality and that, though she was by every metric successful in her Chinese education, her level of proficiency in Chinese had prevented her from integrating in Hong Kong following her education.

- Mr. Stephen Chu Wai-ming, Principal of CSBS Mrs. Aw Boon Haw Secondary School provided a contrasting perspective: that of an administrator of a mainstream educational institution.

Since 2012, CSBS Mrs. Aw Boon Haw Secondary School has seen its population of EM students expand rapidly, from one to over 80. In growing the EM student base of his school, Chu reflected that the largest obstacle he felt he faced was lack of student interest in developing Chinese language proficiency and weak support from the parents of these students. To this end, Chu required that each student accept a policy requiring the development of Chinese language proficiency as a prerequisite to entering the program. More importantly though to the success of his students, Chu also implemented an individualized curriculum. Dubbed an “invitational education,” Chu’s pedagogy focuses on incorporating elements of multiculturalism in the classroom and providing resources, such as after-school learning support tutorials, for those that require additional help. In addition, Chu also developed a policy of flexibility in requirements so as to accommodate the special needs of EM students. Specifically this meant allowing students access to religious facilities at school and granting students religious holidays when necessary. Through this approach nearly all of Chu’s students achieved a high degree of proficiency in Mandarin and over 90% passed the school’s post-secondary evaluation.

- Dr. Miron Bhowmik, Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Center for Governance and Citizenship at the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) and the panel’s third speaker, then presented some research findings drawing on one General Research Fund (GRF) project, one Public Policy Research (PPR) Project and his doctoral research on ethnic minority education. Professor Kerry Kennedy of HKIEd was the Principal Investigator (PI) for those two public funded research projects and he was also the Principal Supervisor of Dr. Bhowmik’s doctoral supervision panel.

Dr. Bhowmik's own PhD research focused on three schools, two of which were designated schools, through which he sought to present a comprehensive, rather than representative, understanding of the issues faced by EM students. Dr. Bhowmik showcased the learning from all these research in relation to four groups of stakeholders in order to support a better EM education: policy-makers, teachers, schools and society. He also circulated a list of scholarly books and journal articles that have been published as outputs of their research projects.

Dr. Bhowmik posits that though the Hong Kong government has recognised the need to better support EM students, policy makers have been unsuccessful in their attempts to reshape Hong Kong's education system in part because they fail to differentiate between two distinct groups of EM students, those born in Hong Kong and new arrivals, each of which possesses different needs. Additionally, Dr. Bhowmik asserted that too great of a focus has been placed on Chinese language learning in policy making. This has both overshadowed deficiencies in other areas of learning, such as mathematics and science, and has led to poor oversight of students. Perhaps most surprisingly, this gap in oversight has been so wide that policy makers have even failed to effectively track student retention rates. By Dr. Bhowmik's account, as many as 25% of EM students drop out of school at a secondary education level – as a result of poor oversight though, this has gone unnoticed.

Teachers have played an important role in this. Among educators, negative stereotypes of EM students are common and lowered expectations for EM students result in lower academic achievement on the part of EM students. Many teachers fail to understand the cultural backgrounds of their students and, consequently, lack an understanding of how this culture intersects with education. In the case of South Asian students, for whom, culturally, teachers are highly respected and assumed to play a parental role by families, the failure of teachers to understand this cultural value has resulted in negative stereotypes about their parents and also less collective oversight for these students. The most material impact of this has been poor performance among South Asian students as students often lack the academic support at school that their peers receive at home.

Dr. Bhowmik also faults schools, which, through weak leadership, have allowed for this lack of cultural understanding to go uncorrected. The consequences of this are observed in the prevalence of learning environments that show no understanding of the special learning needs of EM students, such as classrooms where EM students that lack proficiency in Chinese are prohibited from speaking both English and their mother-tongue. Most obviously though the failure of school administrators to correct this problem is apparent in the continued existence of designated schools, which, although abandoned in name, continue to be the primary platform of education for EM students.

The failings of each of these three groups stem from the failings of one larger stakeholder, which has both perpetuated and exacerbated these dynamics: society. Dr. Bhowmik contends that the benefit of cultural diversity is not well recognized in many Asian societies. Racism is common in Hong Kong and affirmative action is not valued in Chinese culture, it has gone uncorrected in

public policy. While multiculturalism is valued in the West, this type of multiculturalism has had little traction in Asian societies in part because it is grounded in liberal democratic tradition. This last point was later disputed by Dr. Puja Kapai, Associate Professor at the University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Law, who cited the prevalence of multicultural education in South Asia as evidence to the contrary. Then Dr. Bhowmik responded that diversity in Asia exists for long time, these are grounded in different political and social traditions, therefore, these needs to be recognized and utilized in order to formulate any multicultural educational policies for the countries and territories in Asia.

- Dr. Liz Jackson, author of "Muslims & Islam in US Education: Reconsidering Multiculturalism" closed the panel by discussing the findings of her book, in which she seeks to understand how to bridge the educational gap for Muslim Americans found in the United States educational system post 9/11. Jackson argued that, because of the United States educational system's failure to adequately explain Muslim issues and incorporate the individualized needs of Muslims into the US educational system, a culture of ignorance and bigotry that was first created following 9/11 has continued to exist. Jackson argues that in order to rectify this, a new definition of multiculturalism in education is necessary.

Dr. Jackson critiqued the three most common definitions of multiculturalism – assimilationism, traditional multiculturalism and critical multiculturalism – in favor of a fourth definition, interculturalism, which, in education, would encourage the development of lifelong skills for filtering and interpreting information among students, such as critical media literacy.

Dr. Jackson also noted that in this model teachers should be excused from the burden of having to understand the culture of all students. Instead, teachers should focus on adapting their teaching strategy to take into account the individual needs of students as a result of their culture as necessary. Implicitly, Dr. Jackson also asserted that the experience of Muslims in the US and the conclusions she has reached in her research are didactic, containing insight into the role that interculturalism can play in addressing the needs of EM students in Hong Kong.

Following the end of the first panel, the floor was opened to questions. Some of the questions asked included:

- Which model of education – designated or mainstream – was most effective in improving the conditions of EM students?
- How one might properly equip teachers with the resources required to accommodate the needs of many culturally different groups of students?
- Which EM students have faced the greatest problems in integrating?

Though inconclusive answers were given to the first two of these questions, Dr. Bhowmik noted that, based on his knowledge of Hong Kong's South Asian community, Pakistani and Nepalese EM students have encountered the greatest problems in integrating.

Panel Two: Exploring Mainstream, integrated and Inclusive Education

The second panel consisted of three speakers: two professors and one student.

The panel was moderated by first speaker Dr. Puja Kapai, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Hong Kong, who provided a theoretical overview of the structure of Hong Kong's educational system and the implications that it has had on society, as well as what the underpinnings of a more inclusive model for education might be.

- Dr. Kapai, herself a product of the Hong Kong school system, have attended both designated and private schools, contended that Hong Kong's educational system plays an important role in marginalising ethnic minorities, contributing to their 'otherness' within society and enabling institutional racism. This has been perpetuated by a variety of factors, which for Hong Kong's private school system include the school selection process, school structure, and cost of education, and for Hong Kong's public school system include a failure to promote multiculturalism within school pedagogy, lack of accessibility for students, and even the exclusion of EM students in admissions. Hong Kong's educational system, in particular the education offered by designated schools, fails to capture the benefits that multiculturalism can provide, which include higher achievement among bilingual students and greater social equality through encouraging an end to stereotypes. Dr. Kapai closed by arguing that a multicultural, integrated educational model must be adopted in Hong Kong, but in order to do so additional research must be undertaken to better understand which models for multiculturalism are most effective and how these models can be implemented.
- Prativa Sapkota, a graduate of a designated school and a student at HKUST provided perhaps the most convincing condemnation of designated schools. Sapkota began by recanting her experience as student at a designated school, through which she provided an overview of the three largest differences she felt, as a student, existed between her experience and that of her peers at a mainstream school: the Chinese language curriculum, the level of academic support that students receive, and the availability of teaching resources.

Sapkota noted that, comparatively, less importance was placed on Chinese language learning within designated schools, both among school faculty and students. Relative to her peers, Sapkota found her Chinese language education to be simplistic, emphasizing grammar and formal writing with little regard for practicality. Beyond this, students lacked an understanding of the importance of Chinese in finding a job and later integrating in Hong Kong. Sapkota felt that she received comparatively less resources for practice than her mainstream peers.

- Dr. Wu-Ying Hsieh, Assistant Professor, Division of Learning, Development and Diversity, faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong closed the seminar by presenting her findings on

special education in the United States, and through it, a possible model for ethnic minority integration in Hong Kong.

In her research Dr. Hsieh found that most important to integrating those with special needs into the US educational system was the development of values, policies and practices that allow every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to have a sense of belonging within a learning environment. This necessitates enabling students to have access to an education, which requires the removal of physical barriers to education; to participate, through encouraging inclusive instruction; and to have access to the resources required to support their education. Such an inclusive education, Dr. Hsieh argues, must be provided at the youngest age possible. Like the findings of Dr. Jackson in the first panel, those of Dr. Hsieh were implicitly intended to be instructive, presenting a model through which EM students might find greater inclusion.

The second panel concluded with what was arguably both the most pressing and difficult to answer question:

- What, of the many interconnected issues contributing to the state of EM education in Hong Kong, should be addressed first?

Dr. Kapai argued that a baseline for education must be created and stated that 'it is only when we start LEARNING together that we can start LIVING together.' Dr. Bhowmik agreed, asserting that the government must now focus on ensuring that there are 'no losers' within Hong Kong's educational system.

Open Sharing

Due to time constraints final thoughts from Devi Novovianti, Corporate Communications Officer, Equal Opportunities Commission and Shalini Mahtani, Founder, The Zubin Foundation were put on hold until the next seminar.

Nini Forino, Director of Public Affairs, U.S. Consulate General, closed the session by marking this seminar as an important step in dialogue and suggesting that much more discussion is still needed.

We would like to thank The Zubin Foundation for volunteering to provide the meeting notes.

